

architect is left to be completed by the decorator: This is surely not the case! Is it not more rational to conclude that it is the province of the decorator not to interfere in any way with the design of the architect, but as far as he is concerned, to further and carry out his conception, design, and intention? But let us apply the directions offered. "Following out this principle on the building before us, we have red for the undersides of the girders, yellow on the round portions of the columns, blue in the hollows of the capitals." In effect this treatment will render the hollows deeper, the flats or planes more glaring, and the projections or edges more sharp and cutting. Surely this can hardly be considered as comports with the design of the architect; unless, indeed, a compact had been made between him and the decorator, that what was left incomplete by the one should be furnished by the other. Let us consider, for a moment, the conditions under which the architect works, and particularly in the present case, and in the building in question. What are these "girders" which are to be rendered as conspicuous as possible by the most forcible colour we possess: red, for example. "Girders" we naturally take to be agents employed by the architect to support and keep together certain parts of the structure; that they are not essentially a part of the design and chosen for the purposes of display, but are matters forced upon the designer by necessity, and such as, if he could, he would be glad to dispense with. Yet we see the recommendation is to paint them red, and thus to give them conspicuity it is desirable to avoid, for if considered as ornament, they are but tributary, and not principal. It is evident that this is a mistaken view of the matter, neither supported by science nor common sense.

My objections to what is proposed lead very naturally to the inquiry of what I would offer in its stead. As a painter, my reply is ready and direct. I would treat the whole interior of the building, with all its parts and particulars, as a painter would treat his picture, which being made up of a number of objects of greater and less interest and importance to his subject, requires to be harmonised into one complete and perfect whole. I should, therefore, proceed to lower and tone down all the subordinate portions and points, so as to bring into notice those parts and particulars which give force and character to the subject, either in the sentiment of tone and colour, or in the objects which are to be the principal and leading features of the whole. Applying this to the work in question, the mode of proceeding is clearly before us. We have to neutralize and subdue all the parts and particulars which in any degree interfere with the proper and essential design; to keep matters of mere ornament in their places; and above all things to put such objects as girders as much out of sight as possible, in order that the main design and character of the work may become the more striking and apparent. This, without making any pretensions, is just the common sense of the thing, an article which, in Pope's estimation, although no—

"Science, is fairly worth the seven."

We shall see also, by looking at the nature of the building, and observing the quantity of light admitted, that weak colours will fully serve the purpose of decoration; that strong colours attacking the eye must be highly prejudicial to the effect; and that therefore the "primaries," blue, red, and yellow, ought, to be dispensed with altogether. Pinks, tender greens, with a little orange,—the daylight and the glass supplying a variety of prismatic tints, will be found, if well disposed, all that can be required in the way of decoration. The whole of these tints, combined, ought to produce a neutral tone—a warm, tender gray, upon which the multiplicity of coloured objects exhibited will show themselves to the best advantage.

E. V. RIPPINGILL.

Sta.—As a friend of Mr. Gilbert French, who wrote the "Hints for the Arrangement of Colours," printed in your journal of the 11th of August, 1849, permit me to say, that, judging from Mr. Jones's lecture, the arrangement of colour urged in his "Hints" has been to a great extent adopted for the decoration of the

great exhibition building, and enforced by the arguments and authorities there previously used. Whatever may be said of their applicability in this case, I think it scarcely fair that Mr. French should be entirely unrecognised in the matter.

STUM CUIQUE.

* * We have received several other communications as to painting the building, including one from Mr. Allen, further enforcing the suggestion made in his paper, which we recently printed.* We are unable, however, to give them space. The last-named correspondent says truly:—"The subject of colour is one of extreme difficulty, and has not been treated as an art or science, but rather as one of precedent, and of precedent the most narrow and confined. The call now made for its aid must lead us to regret the absence of a theory of colour, such a theory as only a master mind can elicit. A true theory of colour would be a wonderful monument of human genius. No difficulty would be found if we had it: we should not refer to precedent, but refer precedent to it, and accept it or reject it accordingly. We should not be involved in perplexity, but work on with confidence, sure of our aim."

As relates to that portion of the building already painted, and the general arrangement adopted,—blue, white, and yellow, for the columns, and red for the underside of the girders, we feel it necessary to say that Mr. Jones has failed to convince us that the effect will be good, in face of the evidence afforded by our own eyesight. Moreover the principle adopted seems to us a wrong one. The building is a construction of iron and glass, and this fact should be properly set forth, not elaborately disguised. The iron columns, striped as they now are, are degraded into wooden posts, and the girders, painted red, come oppressively down upon the spectator, and seem much too heavy for their slight supporters.† In comparison with this arrangement, the one compartment which is painted a pale green looks quite satisfactory.

The artist asks his critics to suspend their judgment, and wait patiently the event; but we are not satisfied to do so, as alteration would of course be impossible. We sincerely hope that the matter will be further considered, as we feel sure that the present arrangement, if persisted in, will produce an unsatisfactory result.

A HISTORICAL ESSAY ON TASTE.*

We will suppose our taste to be at present only what that of an ancient had become, who had been travelling in the south and east, and had not yet entered Greece. We will fancy ourselves full of Sphinxes, pyramids, Babels, and painted ramparts, ready to pour them out on the astonished Hellenic barbarians; and supposing ourselves to have had one of those convenient trances invented by romancers to get rid of time,—we will further imagine ourselves standing in view of the Acropolis of Athens. We are at once struck by the far superior proportion and harmony of the edifices which crown it, to that exhibited by those we have recently left. It is sufficient to bring forward the Parthenon as a model of Greek taste. The grand portico, the beautifully sculptured pediment, and the far-reaching perspective of the double row of columns, the whole backed up by a sky, in the words of the poet, so deeply, beautifully blue—and we must give the Greeks the credit of calculating on their sky—produce an effect not to be surpassed. In this building we observe proportion, grandeur, beauty, grace; but no absurdity. The columns do not carry, as in many modern buildings, a mere ledge of stone, useless and insignificant, but they sustain a superstructure of daily use for shade and protection, underneath which the people might retreat from the noontide glare, or take refuge when the gods talked to them in thunder—whither they might flee to their divine mercy, for protection from their wrath. Here then we have utility as well as magnificence; we have also a grand effect of light and shade, often too little considered in these days: we have colour taste—

fully and submissively employed, and lending a tone and relief to the sculpture. In our climate such polychromy would be difficult to adopt, except by the use of material itself naturally coloured. Do we ask for a proof of the taste of the Greeks in sculpture, more than we have seen? Let us enter the Temple, and contemplate the awful statue of Minerva, by Phidias. Is it like the sphinx? Both are vast, and there the resemblance ends; but Minerva is, notwithstanding her size, eminently beautiful: she is, as she ought to be, chaste. It is chastity, purity of taste, that distinguishes both this statue and all that we behold around us; there is nothing ridiculously grotesque, nothing immensely useless, nothing striking only in deformity. Do we seek evidence of Grecian taste in painting? Let us go and see the birds pecking at Zeuxis' fruit, and Zeuxis himself deceived by his rival Parrhasius' curtain. Let us look at Apelles' visiting-card, a single stroke of his brush. Were these stories without foundation in fact, the mere invention of them would show how necessary the ancients thought the following of nature. Would we know the Greek taste in literature, in oratory? Let us go and hear the chorus with which Sophocles is defending himself, on a charge of insanity, from his son, so proving that a man who could write with his taste was certainly not mad: let us listen to Pericles reproving, soothing the people; to Demosthenes stirring them up against Philip. It is unnecessary to dwell upon these things; but it is hence to be observed that the ruling principle of Grecian taste in all the arts was purity,—that it resulted from a faithful study of nature, and so from a simplicity that allows of ornament only in an appropriate manner, and as it is suggested by the subject. The ruling idea is never obscured and buried by fragments of foreign ideas: thus unity is preserved; and it is from that unity of design alone that any thing like true grandeur can result; while it is the justness of adornment on that grandeur which lends the grace, the smile unto the face of Jove. The observance of this ancient taste suggests painful considerations concerning much of the modern. We often find a columnar display, a forest of stone posts of no utility whatever; these pillars more often supported than supporting; probably a dead wall behind them; and sometimes there also stare at us strange ornaments about as appropriate to the matter as Horace's dolphin in the woods. Where is the purity of taste in these things? Where is even the idea in such buildings? Verily, they rather represent the absence of idea, just as black does the absence of colour. There is nothing more hideous in architecture than a false front put on to conceal baldness; when you are compelled to look on a whole façade, not as an integral part of the building, but as a screen to hide incapacity. There is not time here to dwell on any peculiarities of taste, in those developments of Greek art that occurred among the Greek colonists on the coast of Asia Minor, or in the plains of the Xanthus. We are indebted to Sir Charles Fellows for the rescue of Lycian art from obscurity, and some curious specimens, especially of tombs, are to be seen where you have all often been—in the British Museum. For details on the subject, it may save time to refer you at once to his work.

From Greece taste travels westward with complete grace; it has redeemed its Oriental character at Athens, and become pure, and thus arises in Rome. As the Romans imitated the Greeks, we have little that is new to remark, but that taste by degrees acquired a more florid and flowing character than it had before possessed,—somewhat more, too, of variety, which may be considered an advantage, the only thing chargeable against Greece being a too great sameness. Roman taste, previous to its Greek era, was probably such as we should expect from a purely warlike nation; but when that warlike spirit was, in the language of the classic, itself overcome by what it conquered, then we find, as it were, Athens transferred to Rome, the Acropolis to the Capitol. In the later period of Roman architecture, we observe the use of the arch, the introduction of which form gives almost all other styles an advantage over the Greek. We find the taste of the Romans in the imperial age the taste of victors. They practised an immensity of design, of which there

* See p. 280, ante.

† We inferred, from conversation at the Institute of Architects, that the red for the girders was abandoned (p. 604, ante); but we are told this is not the case.

‡ See p. 280, ante.

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